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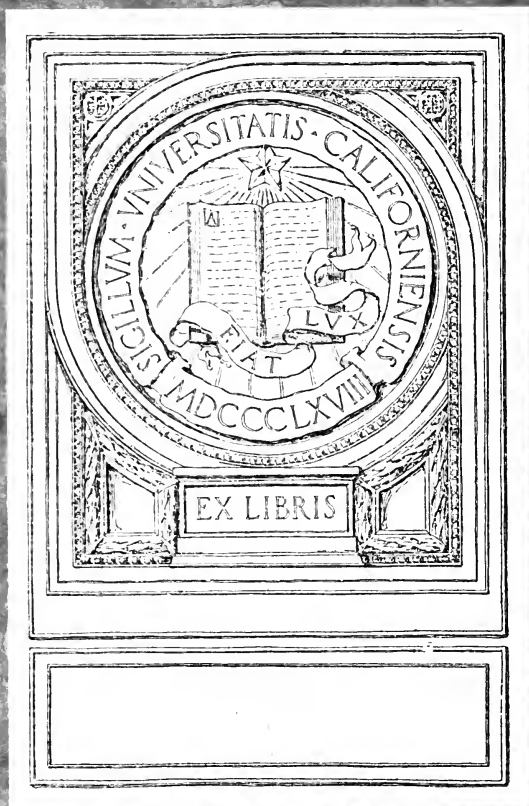
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MAHASENA :

A PLAY IN

THREE ACTS, BY

MAURICE BARING.

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A PLAY IN
THREE ACTS, BY
MAURICE BARING.



OXFORD: B. H. BLACKWELL
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ABSTRACT

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“Ihr führt ins Leben uns hinein,
Ihr lasst den Armen schuldig werden.” —GOETHE.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

MAHASENA, The King of the Island of Lanka.

MAHINDA, A Prophet.

VIRATA.

SUGRIVA, A Warrior.

YASSA, The King's Minister.

TISSA, A Courtier.

CHANDRA BAI.

ANOULA, Wife of Sugriva.

PRITHA, Chandra's Serving Woman.

Priests, Warriors, etc.

The action takes place in the Island of Lanka.



MAHASENA.

ACT I.

The Palace of MAHASENA. On the right is a flight of steps leading up to a throne. On the left a flight of steps leading to a temple. In the centre a terrace looking out on to the garden.

Enter MAHINDA.

TISSA. Whom seek you in the Palace of the King?

MAHINDA. From the calm summits of untrampled snow
I come, from voiceless caves and unvisited haunts,
Where for long years in vigil and stern fast
I communed with the silence of my soul.
To-night the moon is full; you celebrate
The feast-day of the sacred blossoming bough;
The ancient rite. From distant lands I come
To bring the worship of a heart made pure
And proved by cloudless years of ecstasy.

TISSA. Welcome. Thou art a prophet wise and holy;
Whom seekest thou?

MAHINDA. I seek the King.

TISSA. He comes.

MAHINDA. Leave me with him; of old he knoweth me.
[Exit TISSA.]

Enter MAHASENA.

MAHINDA. Hail Mahasena! Hail!

MAHASENA. Thy face I know not,
Yet welcome.

MAHINDA. Draw thou near to me and look;
I am Mahinda, whom thou knewest of old.
But the long, solemn years have shrunk my form.

MAHASENA. Mahinda! Hail, thou man of saintliness.
Most blessed be this day of thy return.

MAHINDA. Draw near, my son, and let me scan thy face.

MAHASENA. Give me thy blessing.

MAHINDA (*looking at him*). Changed, and yet the same!

The same as when in the dark, troubled years,
Thou, like the lightning from a cloud, didst fall;
Thou, with the flowing locks and face of gold,
With lion-shoulders and mild lotus eye;—
Thou, void of passion, with all virtue blest,
Boldest among the bold in the field of war,
Sedate and seeking still the holy path,
Taught by the elders in our ancient rite;
Thou, who with voice of pealing thunder spakest
Among a doubtful people, Priest and pattern,
Of Law and Duty in the blighted land;—
Think now upon the day of thine anointment,
When people from the Island's confines came
To celebrate the rite and share the feast.

MAHASENA. What of that day?

MAHINDA. When the long rolling tide
Of joyful tribes uplifted loud their voices,

I spoke a gentle message to thy heart ;
Hast thou forgotten ? " Child," I said to thee,
" Child, whose great heart is made of tested gold,
Thou to thy darkened people hast brought light,
Thou in their hearts hast kindled a spark divine ;
Through thee thy race will be reborn, and cleansed
With fire, but thou thyself must find new birth,
And by the roads of anguish climb to peace."

MAHASENA. Thou speakest riddles.

MAHINDA. On that ominous day
There grew three branches on the bamboo-tree.
Two branches green ; the third branch shone like
flame.

MAHASENA. A sword of fire.

MAHINDA. Who is the enemy
Whom thou must wound with it ?

MAHASENA. I know of none.

MAHINDA. Thou art the foe. That sword must pierce
thy heart.

Eternally the wound shall bleed, yet thou
Through mists of pain shall see the face of peace.

MAHASENA. Give me thy blessing, Father, as of old.

MAHINDA. I cannot, for a spirit stays my hand ;
Yet will I bless thee when the hour is come.

MAHASENA. I need thy blessing now.

MAHINDA. I cannot bless thee.
Farewell.

MAHASENA. Stop ! Father, heavy is my heart ;
I need thine aid and guidance, and more greatly

I need thy comfort ; hearken to my tale ;
Heed my distress—my heart cries out to thee—
Desert me not.

MAHINDA. I cannot give thee aid ;—
Not yet. For thou, unaided and alone,
Must find the way.

MAHASENA. Thou dost withhold thy help !
Refusest blessing and desertest me !
Yield to my prayer, have pity, heed my tale,
Hear me.

MAHINDA. I cannot till the hour be come.
Farewell.

MAHASENA. Oh ! thou dost wrong to leave me thus,
In my sore trouble to abandon me.

MAHINDA. My help could not avail thee. 'Tis too late
To help thee, and too soon.

[*Exit MAHINDA.*

MAHASENA. He speaks the truth.

It is too late. Ah ! woe is me, too late.

(*Music is heard*).

(*Women are heard singing*).

Like far-seen palms in the desert air,
Like phantom isles hung over the seas,
Like glistening haze in the noontide's glare,
Or webs of silver on twilight trees :
So thou seemest, a film of light,
A baseless dream which at dawn must die ;
Like dew of the morn or the snowflake bright,—
Child of the moon descend from the sky.

Come, for the darkness has risen from earth,
And the moon has breathed o'er the sleeping sea ;
We are weary of toil, we are sated with mirth,
We are fain to dream, and our dream is of thee.
The moon and the stars and the lotus flower,
The lilies and dusk are of no avail,
For thou art the dream of the twilight hour
And lotus and lily, O fair ! O frail !

MAHASENA. They hymn thee, Chandra, daughter of the
moon,

And the pale silver passion of thy rays
Descends upon me, blinding me with bliss,
And drives away the darkness from my soul.
There is no turning back. The fruit is ripe,
And I must pluck, must taste of it, or die.

[*Exit* MAHASENA.]

Enter MAHINDA and Chorus of Women still singing.

MAHINDA. For whom, O women, make ye melody ?

PRITHA. For Chandra, once the wife of Moggoli.

MAHINDA. I knew him not.

PRITHA. A fearless man of war.

He fell when Mahasena freed the Isle
From the wild tribes.

MAHINDA. A youth ?

PRITHA. No, ripe in years.

MAHINDA. And Chandra mourns him still ?

PRITHA. Two years she mourned ;
But now, though sad her heart, her tears are dry ;

Hast thou not seen her ?

MAHINDA.

No, a stranger I.

PRITHA. Thou shalt behold her at the rise of moon,

She goes to listen to the solemn rite.

MAHINDA. She is but young ?

PRITHA.

Chandra is still a child,

Yet envious years would weigh on her in vain ;—

She is not wrought of perishable clay,

But of some delicate essence thin and rare,

Some texture whereof iris-dews are made,

Or wings of dragon-flies or petals of foam,

Or the frail, iridescent, floating shell.

In vain we liken her to star or flower ;

Fairer is she than earthly semblances,

She is a spirit wandered from the moon ;—

A sigh, a melody made palpable.

She moves as though she floated o'er the flowers,

And the earth seems to fawn beneath her feet.

And the sky seems to crown her as a Queen.

But see, she comes.

[MAHINDA and the Women withdraw.]

Enter CHANDRA and ANOULA.

ANOULA. The full moon rises o'er the quiet sea,

The flutes are silent, for the rite begins ;

'Tis late.

CHANDRA. I go not to the festival.

Here, on the terrace, will I rest awhile

And listen to the melody. You go ?

ANOULA. I will remain with you.

CHANDRA. My heart is sad.

Two years ago this day my husband fell.

ANOULA. Loved you him greatly, Chandra ?

CHANDRA. As a child

Loves what to her is virtue, glory, strength ;

I loved him for his courage, and my heart

Seemed to be stricken by a freezing blight

The day they brought me news that he had fallen

Upon the battle-field.

ANOULA. How chanced his death ?

CHANDRA. His death was strange.

ANOULA. Fell he not in the fight ?

CHANDRA. No, when the fight was over and foes had fled,

He sought the mountains.

ANOULA. To pursue the foe ?

CHANDRA. Alone at night, nor bade his troops farewell,

Nor told the King. His purpose none could guess.

Perchance to see if remnants of the foe

Still lurked.

ANOULA. And then ?

CHANDRA. He never more returned ;

'Tis all I know ; and after many days

They found his body.

ANOULA. Wounded ?

CHANDRA. Pierced with wounds.

The Captains said he sought death willingly

Seeking the hills. And yet I cannot think

He wished to die.

ANOULA. Chandra, you suffered much.
You loved and suffered ; but I never loved.
They wed me to Sugriva, when a child ;
He loved me not, and soon his lack of love
Was turned to hate, and he tormenteth me.
My life is bitter, I return his hate ;
But what availeth hatred against might ?

CHANDRA. A grievous tale.

ANOULA. Alas ! that is not all
Dark-eyed Virata came to comfort me ;
He sang me sweet, sad songs of hopeless love ;
And on the day he sought the battle-field,
He told me he had vowed to meet with death
For love of me. I bade him live and love ;
My heart was full. I could not check the word.

CHANDRA. I pity you. It bodes no good, Anoula.

Yet Mahasena loves to praise his heart.

ANOULA. Men say the King oft seeks to talk with you.

CHANDRA. 'Tis idle speech.

ANOULA. Is the King all he seems ?

CHANDRA. And more ; he is as true as he is great—

Brave, wise and good ; the noblest of all men.

ANOULA. You love the King.

CHANDRA. True things I love, and fair.

ANOULA. Yet, if you loved a man and in him found

All virtues, and the idol were to fall—

His fair fame tarnished—would you love him still ?

CHANDRA. If I loved one for truth or bravery,

And he proved false or cowardly or base,

I from my bleeding heart would tear the love,
And trample on it like a festering weed.

ANOULA. Your heart is made of unrelenting ice;
I, loving, for his whole self love a man,
And nought could then deceive me; if he stooped
To baseness, as strange flaws may haply lurk
In brightest rubies, my unconquered love
Would like an ocean rise to wash the stain.
Even though the flaw be deep and past all healing,
The ruby still a blood-red ruby shines;
The man is still the man I loved and love;
Because I gave his glory all my praise,
Must I refuse my pity to his shame?
Then, more than ever, would he need my love,
And then most rich would its abundance be.

CHANDRA. If I loved one who seemed to me all bright,
And found the gem was false, the gold mere clay,
Not him, nor yet myself, could I forgive.

ANOULA. I would not love false gold or lying gems;
Yet if I found commingled with the metal
Thin streaks of baser clay, it would not prove
Gold to be tinsel, nor destroy my love.

CHANDRA. The man you speak of is a living lie.

ANOULA. You have no knowledge of the deeps of
love.

CHANDRA. My love must rise like worship to a god.

ANOULA. Ah! prayer is cold, your heart a tranquil
temple;
But mine is like a black and seething pool.

CHANDRA. My love could equal yours in strength.

ANOULA. Divine

You are and pure ; but I of earthly clay
Am fashioned.

CHANDRA. No, Anoula, I am frail.

ANOULA. But see, the rite is ended, and the King
Comes hither. I must hasten. Fare you well.

[Exit ANOULA.]

Enter MAHASENA.

MAHASENA. I bring thee branches from the sacred shrine.

CHANDRA. I thank thee with a lowly and humble heart.

MAHASENA. Nay, thank me not, make not obeisance :

Thou stand'st and every man must kneel to thee,
Lady of moonlight and the splendid snow ;
Lady, I kneel.

CHANDRA. Thou puttest me to shame.

MAHASENA. I have come hither from the sacred rite,

But with a heedless ear I heard the chants,
And watched with vacant eyes the leaping fires ;
For brighter than the blazing sacrifice
Before me shone the stillness of thine eyes,
And purer than the whiteness of the flames
I breathed the fragrance of thy spotless soul.
Chandra, with humble heart and bended head,
I bring to thee but my mortality,
Yet tried, and rendered strong with love of thee.
Wilt thou ascend to glorify my throne ?

And share my crown, my kingdom and my life ?

CHANDRA. Is this the truth ? or but a lying dream ?

MAHASENA. Bend down and listen to my beating heart.

CHANDRA. Ofttimes in dreams I saw a lordly spirit,
With glistening sandals and a sword of light ;
His heart of snow shone through his fiery eyes,
And, Mahasena, that bright face was thine.

MAHASENA. O Miracle ! O Wonder ! O sweet hour !

CHANDRA. Thou wast, it seemed, as far removed from me
As the white cloud upon the mountain top
Is distant from the lily of the valley.

MAHASENA. O whitest of the lilies of the valley !

Oh ! Let me kneel and breathe thy spotless dew !

CHANDRA. Nay, heed : for love which is born suddenly
As swiftly fades away.

MAHASENA. Thou deemst my love
A sudden, short-lived flower. Through long, sad
months

I worshipped thee, nor dared to speak my love.

I loved thee long ago ; at twilight once

I saw thee walking by the dark grey shore ;

The wind was in thy hair, thy floating veil

Fluttered and seemed as though t'would melt like dew
Upon the radiant rose-leaves of thy limbs.

I had not dreamed that there could breathe such
beauty ;

I gazed with blinded eyes, and a great wave

Stunned me and bore me on a rushing tide ;

I thought that I had died, until I knew

That I had just been born.

CHANDRA.

I pray thee, cease :

Such speech doth wound my soul. O King, I know
Thy heart is in a holy space. Dark wings
Have ne'er disturbed its silent, radiant air.
Speak not as meaner men, whose hearts are swayed
By fitful passions.

MAHASENA.

I am but a man—

Oh ! let me love thee with a mortal's love ;
For love methinks is so divine a thing
That it exalts the heart of humblest clay ;
My heart is but a vessel of base earth,
But it is filled with holy fire, it glows
Like the dark beryl, and soft spirit hands
Bear it aloft and lay it at thy feet.
How can I find meet words to tell to thee
What is at once so tender and so strong ?
Words bright and pure and deep enough for thee ;
How does the sea speak to the rising moon ?

CHANDRA. I heard such words but once, and in a dream ;
As silent as a dream the garden shines,

Save where the fountains splash midst the dark trees.

MAHASENA. My love is like those silver, sobbing streams.

CHANDRA. Far-off the listless lapping of the tide
Whispers the secret of the boundless sea.

MAHASENA. My words shall creep towards thee like soft
foam.

CHANDRA. Upon the pool, like ghosts, the shadowy swans
Move to and fro among the floating flowers.

MAHASENA. For ever round the lotus that is thee

My soul shall circle like a shadowy swan.

CHANDRA. Hark ! to the dying echo of a bell.

MAHASENA. It is the solemn midnight hour, O hear ;

I swear to love and guard and honour thee

With constant and imperishable love ;

Thou art the light, the music, of my life,

And, deaf and blind, I can but follow thee.

CHANDRA. I swear to love thee in Eternity.

Be witness, moon and stars and infinite night,

And rolling worlds and this our ample earth ;

All mortals and immortals and dark spirits,

All rangers of the forests, and all Gods !

Be thou my stronghold, my impregnable tower ;

Hide and protect me with thy wide-winged soul,

And let me lean upon thy fiery sword.

Be thou the dazzling diamond of my life,

Unclouded by the breath of any shame :

Harder than adamant, as crystal clear,

Invariable and steadfast as the sun ;

My Lord, my King ! O heart of fire and snow !

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Chamber in SUGRIVA'S Palace.

ANOULA. The lagging hours creep on and still the stars
Are white. Oh ! will the morning never come ?
The summer lightning flickers in the sky !
The parched and languid creeper yearns for dew ;
The uneasy tide awaits the ruffling breeze
That comes with trembling gold-flakes from the
East,
The East from whence my sun shall rise and shine.
O daylight, come, and bring my heart's desire !
The moon rose and the four white polar stars.
I slumbered all alone and could not sleep ;
All night I heard the curlew's piercing cry ;
My heart awaked, kept watch and watched in vain.
At last ! the lamp's flame flickers and grows pale,
And through the lattice steals a breath of fragrance—
A faint streak glimmers in the sad grey East.

(Outside a voice is heard singing).

The day breaks and the darkness taketh flight,
The north wind blows upon the rippling sea ;

My locks are dripping with the dews of night.
My Dawn, my Daylight, open thou to me.

The spices of thy garden fill the air,
The blossom glistens on thine apple-tree ;
Sweeter than spice art thou, than flowers more fair.
My Dew, my Blossom, open thou to me.

Come, let us seek the mountains of the myrrh,
The hills of frankincense, the fragrant sea,
The north wind blows, the leaves, the water stir.
My Dove, my Springtide, open thou to me.

Enter VIRATA.

ANOULA. At last thou comest. I have waited long ;
All night I slept not, for my heart kept watch.

VIRATA. I feared thy warning words, I durst not come.

ANOULA. Sugriva sought the hills at set of sun.

VIRATA. My sleepless soul, too, sought thee in the night
And found thee not ; but it has found thee now.
Oh ! let me hear thy voice, and touch thy hand,
And drink the light of thy great brooding eyes.

ANOULA. Thou art most peerless among men, thy head
Is like fine gold, O, like the sun thine eyes
Dazzle ; thou shinest like the flaming forest,
Like sunlight on the boundless barley fields
And golden rice of winter. O'er me spread
The great folds of the banner of thy love.

VIRATA. O fair, thy lips are like the honey-comb,
And sweeter than all spices is thy kiss.

ANOULA. O turn away the lightnings of thine eyes,

They overcome me, and my spirit faints.

VIRATA. Then hush thy voice, for like a poisoned arrow
It wounds my heart with sweet and bitter pain.

ANOULA. O turn away thine eyes!

VIRATA. Then hush thy voice ;
Nay, rather speak, and never cease to speak,
And let the poison run through all my veins ;
For it is sweet, O passing sweet !

ANOULA. Then turn
Thine eyes towards me, let their lightnings blind me!
O love, how wondrous is this love of mine ;
More vehement than fire and dark as death.

VIRATA. O love, O brightest, O delight of mine eyes,
My heart is full, and well nigh breaks for joy !

ANOULA. Yet woven with my bliss are threads of sorrow.

VIRATA. Tell me thy grief, and I will drive it hence.

ANOULA. My grief is closely woven with my joy,
Such overwhelming bliss is fraught with pain ;
Sorrow is mingled with the wine of joy.
And Fate and Fear are watching o'er my love.

VIRATA. Thou fearest whom or what? Perchance
Sugriva?

ANOULA. I fear no mortal, but our very love
Is terrible, for it is like the sea,
For it is like the treasonable sea,
That gleams afar, smooth as a polished sapphire ;
Yet shakes the adventurous ship with buffeting waves ;
Bitter and salt, and wild with hissing foam,
And its mysterious deeps are full of death.

VIRATA. Then let us float upon the glassy surface,
Lulled by the whisper of its summer sound.

ANOULA. My joy is very sad, and very sweet
My sorrow. I will perish in love's sea.
Among the pearls, among the oozy forests,
I shall not hear its music any more.
I will forget. Sweet will such shipwreck be.
No, no, I will remember ; I will live
And taste again my bitter, dark delight.
My joy is sad ; but sweet, sweet is my sorrow.

VIRATA. See, the glad sunshine through the lattice
shines.

ANOULA. Alas ! begone ! flee swiftly, lest Sugriva
Should find thee here.

VIRATA. I care not if he comes ;
I cannot live throughout the endless day.
I scarce have come and thou wilt drive me hence.

ANOULA. My heart is faint with fear ; I pray thee go.
Last night a shadow veiled the rising moon,
And in the darkness, while I watched alone,
I saw a funeral pyre. My love, begone.

VIRATA. I will not go ; close by thee will I stay,
And hold thy hands and kiss thy delicate hands,
And crush with kisses thy soft flower-like eyes,
And drink the honey of thy scarlet lips
Unto the end, and blind thee with my kiss.

ANOULA. Oh ! kill me with thy kisses, let me die ;
Thou who hast given me light and life and joy,
Take back the other gifts and give me Death.

All other death would be a meaner thing,
Such death were greater than all joys of life;
Now, with the last pang of thy last wild kiss
To sleep and wake no more! Love, give me Death.
O Beautiful, O Beloved, O my love.

VIRATA. O Brightest, without spot! All fair! O fairest!

(Noise is heard without).

ANOULA. Sugriva?

VIRATA. Fear not. 'Tis the hour of freedom!
[Exit VIRATA.]

(A clash of swords is heard).

ANOULA. They fight! Immortal Gods, protect Virata!

(Pause. ANOULA listens).

Enter VIRATA.

· Saved! and Sugriva?

VIRATA. Straight into his heart
My sword has plunged.

ANOULA. O evil hour! Dark fate!
Virata, know'st thou Mahasena's law?
Thou shalt not kill, and he who kills must die.
What wilt thou do, Virata? Thou must flee.

VIRATA. I shall not flee; straightway I'll seek the King
And tell him all my tale; and he shall judge.
And, if needs be, Anoula, I shall die.

ANOULA. I will to Chandra and implore thy pardon.

SCENE II.

Chamber in MAHASENA'S Palace.

ANOULA. And now that I have poured out all my grief,
I feel that words are vain ; yet on my knees
Once more my hopeless heart shall cry to thee
To grant my prayer, to plead, to win his pardon.
So wild is my distress, I find no words.

CHANDRA. Deep is my pity, great must be thy sorrow
That thou shouldst thus have caused thy husband's
death.

Ah, piteous fate ! How swiftly thou hast met
With pitiless retribution ; yet methinks
The punishment has wiped away all sin.

Enter MAHASENA.

ANOULA. Hear me, O King, for Chandra hears but heeds
not ;

Hear me, and comfort me in my despair !
For by thy law Virata must be slain.
It is not true ; O say this cannot be.
They say Sugriva was a noble man ;
They nothing know, they nothing understand.
I, when a child, was given to Sugriva ;
He loved me not, his love soon turned to hate.
He plagued me like a fiend with blows, and words
More sharp than any blows. And had I prayed
Virata, whom I loved, to set me free,

The blame had been but small ; I prayed him not.
They met in fight ; Sugriva was far-famed
For deeds of arms and in fair fight he fell.
Yet now they say Virata did foul murder !
If there be any justice in the world,
If there be any equity in thee,
Thou canst not let Virata be condemned.
My words are feeble ; King, I have no skill,
But let me die if this is not the truth.
O save Virata ; O have mercy, King.

MAHASENA. Child, I believe thy tale ; I understand
Thy sorrow ; I will strive to save him. Go.

ANOULA (*flings herself at his feet*). I kiss thy feet, my
shield and my defence.

ANOULA *walks on to the terrace as if to go ; she pauses
and listens to the King's words and remains listening
behind a column.*

CHANDRA. Why givest thou false comfort ? It is cruel
To kindle fruitless hopes. Thou knowest well
Virata's doom.

MAHASENA Virata must be saved ;
He met, he slew Sugriva in fair fight.
No murder was it, and no coward's act.

CHANDRA. I grieve for her ; yet how canst thou, as King,
O'erlook the crime ?

MAHASENA. Such is the voice of reason ;
But can thy woman's heart not understand
That blood for blood is but a cruel law ?
I strive to frame new laws of right and truth.

CHANDRA. Thou spakest ever of necessity,
How retribution followed every crime.

MAHASENA. But in Virata's deed there is no crime ;
He slew Sugriva in fair fight, and men
Have done worse things than he for those they loved,
And yet proved guiltless in the eyes of heaven.
Canst thou not conjure up a force of love
Impelling man to any dreadful deed
For one he loved ? And from necessity
Virata acted, and to save Anoula.

CHANDRA. All things but these, thy words, I understand.
This stirs my wonder even that thou, the King,
Who framed the rigid laws of purity
And punishment, whose life in daylight shone
A stainless pattern for all men to follow ;—
Who didst enforce thy laws by sword and sceptre,
Shouldst now, when flagrantly the law is broken,
Talk of the fruitless cruelty of laws.

MAHASENA. Be it right or wrong, Virata shall not die.
I marvel at the hardness of thy heart.

CHANDRA. I am not hard ; and yet I am the spouse
Of him who preached the sanctity of life
And purity of living. Of thy task,
Thy kingly work, I speak, and disregard
My woman's heart.

MAHASENA. Virata shall not die.

(He walks on to the terrace).

Enter YASSA.

YASSA. I seek the King.

CHANDRA. Strange is the King to-day !

YASSA. Is he resolved to save Virata still ?

CHANDRA. He seems to hold him guiltless, and the deed
No crime.

YASSA. The judges and the priests must judge
Virata ; and his penalty is death.

MAHASENA *comes forward.*

MAHASENA. Take order that Virata be released.

YASSA. I swear to thee, O King, thy thought is folly ;
The warriors and the priests are met to judge him ;
And all condemn Sugriva's death ; all curse
Virata's name. Sugriva of all thy captains
Was honoured as the mightiest of the brave,
And had he slain Virata he had reaped
Small blame ; but that Virata should be freed
Will strike the people with amazement dumb ;
"What need," they'll say, "what need of any laws,
If only to be slighted they are made ?"

MAHASENA. It is enough. Virata shall not die.
I have good reasons ; ye shall hear them now.

It was a fatal hour when long ago

I, for the first time, gazed upon thee, Chandra ;

Thy beauty overwhelmed and dazzled me ;

And in that hour a seed of fire was dropped

Within my heart, and soon through all my veins

It raged like poison and destroyed my soul ;

Love, stronger than all mortal things, o'erpowered
me ;

Fateful and bitter and remorseless love.

I swore no earthly thing should hinder me
From making thee my wife. We went to battle
To drive the rebels from the hills; thy husband
Went with me and gave heed to my commands;
And when the battle ceased, nor he nor I
Had taken hurt. A straggler brought me word
At nightfall, that some rebels still lay hid
Among the rocks. I sought thy husband's tent;
I bade him seek the rocky hills, and see
If any remnant of the foe still lived;
He thought there was no peril in the task.
He said that he would seek the hills alone;
I bade him go.

CHANDRA. Thou badest him scour the hills?
What meanest thou? No, not that thou didst hope
That he might die?

MAHASENA. I bade him seek the hills;
He said that he would seek the hills alone.
I bade him go. I knew the hidden peril.
Thou sayest I hoped that he might die? I knew
That he would die; I sent him to his death.
I knew I could not win thee otherwise,
Thou chaste as dew and colder than the moon!

CHANDRA. O Powers of Heaven, have pity on my heart!
My Lord is mad; Yassa, the King is mad!
Or I am mad.

MAHASENA. No, hear me to the end—
I waited until time had healed thy sorrow,
And then I wedded thee; and therefore I,

In my great guilt, refuse to slay Virata,
Who, side by side with me, is innocent.

Chandra——

CHANDRA. Is dead ; you speak with her in vain.

MAHASENA. No, you shall hear me. 'Tis not now alone

Because of this, my crime, that I make haste

To save Virata. I to the great hall

Will go, where the high elders now are met.

Before them all will I reveal the truth ;

And if they wish, I die ; and if they wish,

I will throw dust upon my head and seek

The hills, an outcast ; or, if knowing all,

They still desire the guidance of my hand,

I will remain upon my lofty throne,

For I have ruled them as a goodly King.

And what I was I am ; if there was aught

To praise in me, it lives and cannot die.

I cannot feel remorse because my love,

Like poison, seized my senses and my will,

And thus enslaved, I caused thy husband's death.

Let Mahadeo feel remorse, not I.

He breathed his spirit through the trackless space,

And bade the myriad orbs of flame whirl round

And melt and harden into worlds, and rot

And fester into growth and living things ;

Things subtly fashioned to feel pain and groan,

Which live but by devouring one another,

And chiefest and most piteous of them, man.

The souls of men are prisoned in weak flesh,

And bound to fiery wheels of fate, and thrown
Into the world to spin, like whirling tops
That children lash to madness. And each soul
Is a pure portion of the mind of God ;
Flesh is the rack of God on which he tries
With torments the pure essence of His fire ;
And though man dies, the tired soul cannot die :
It wanders through the rolling centuries
From man to beast, from beast again to man,
Wakeful in man and slumbering in the beast,
And never finds forgetfulness at last.
And as each man, by reason of his soul,
Is God, he, through his flesh, is likewise beast ;
A beast for ever tracked by circumstance,
And hunted unto deadly traps of sin
That bite on him with cruel torturing teeth ;—
Thus, caught and helpless, in the net of Fate,
Compelled by hidden powers to live and sin,
He yet must pay the price of sin in pain.
Therefore, I, knowing that I pay that price,
Say that remorse is not for me ; I wrought
Great deeds and good ; I was not better then
Than any man. I wrought a hateful crime !
No worse was I. All men are made alike,
The difference lies but in the differing blows
Dealt by the hands of blindfold circumstance.
And though I needs must expiate my crime,
I fall not on my knees, nor bow, nor cringe
With tears and pleading. I am but a man.

I fashioned not the boundless universe ;
Let Him who made it for His sport, and breathed
His soul in many myriad earthly atoms,
Burn with remorse ; past mending is His deed.
Not all the dews of death can wipe away
The stain of life ; no bliss of Paradise
Can compensate for life and all its pain :—
Come down to earth and dwell upon the world
If thou wouldst make amends let drop the souls
That thou hast fashioned in the dark abyss
Of nothingness, and let them be no more !
Or if there must be life, then give to man
The light of spirits or the utter dark
And stupified content of thoughtless beasts.
Set the soul free, or quench it utterly.
Therefore I say, Virata, if he sinned,
And I who sinned, are but as every man,
No better and no worse ; and I say more ;
As virtue is its own reward, so sin
Bears in itself its meed of punishment.
Man need add nothing ; if there must be laws,
Call them expedient, call them not divine,
Nor in the name of false divinity
Metre punishment. Give pity in its stead
For every atom that lives anywhere,
And living, can but groan. I bid you speak.
Am I a worthy King ? I go to ask ;—
The people shall reply.

YASSA.

This shall not be ;

Thou stalt not leave this hall ; this cannot be.
 Thou canst not overturn a people's faith,
 And break their idol and destroy their trust.
 There would be no more faith in right and truth,
 No more obedience unto any law.

MAHASENA. Chandra, speak thou.

CHANDRA. I have no words to speak.

Oh ! see you not that I am dumb and blind,
 Senseless and dead ? Above me and beneath
 Is nothingness. The universe has crumbled.
 Stay ! Heed ! It is not true : my words are false.
 Nothing is fallen, nothing is dark, the world,
 The ordered universe is in its place,
 And only thou art fallen ! Thou most mean !
 Most miserable !—

MAHASENA. Cease, I go to speak.

CHANDRA. To ease thy conscience and to make amends !
 To live hereafter with an easy heart !

YASSA. Rather than thou shouldst go and tell this tale,
 I'll draw my sword and kill thee where thou standest ;
 This cannot be.

MAHASENA. Strike ! gladly would I die !

CHANDRA. Yes, thou wouldst die, and from thy shameful
 life

Flee like a renegade. O coward soul !
 All are prepared to face extremest pain
 Save Mahasena !

MAHASENA. All thy taunts are vain ;
 It is no coward fear that prompts my speech.

CHANDRA. If I can make the supreme sacrifice
To live in spite of all, thy wife, with thee,
If I can do this, canst thou not achieve
One slender sacrifice?

MAHASENA. Then let him die ;
I wish no longer to reveal the truth,
Seeing that men are blind and tender women
Have hearts of ice and iron. I will go
And climb the temple steps and don my crown
And cry aloud " People, acclaim your King ! "

*Enter ANOULA, who rushes up to MAHASENA and
falls on her knees.*

ANOULA. King, I have heard, I understand thy soul !
And never nobler seemedst thou to me
Than when thou didst unfold thy bitter tale.
Oh ! find a way to spare Virata's life !

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A Room in MAHASENA'S Palace.

PRITHA. The clarions sound, the dark procession winds
With pipe and drum and noise of trampling hoofs
Into the court, and now the King has come ;
He mounts the throne. The drums and clarions
cease.

The crowd is breathless.

CHANDRA. Has Virata come ?

PRITHA. They lead him bound ! he walks with a firm
step ;

He flinches not. They halt before the King.

CHANDRA. What does the King ?

PRITHA. He gazes on Virata ;

Virata turns his head away from him,

Doubtless his guilty eyes avoid that gaze—

The King's pure fearless eyes. Virata kneels.

CHANDRA. And the King ?

PRITHA. Paler than Virata he ;

For doubtless pity fills his kindly heart ;

And now the steel blade flashes.

CHANDRA. Cease, be still !

It is enough. O maidens, I am sick
And faint with horror.

PRITHA. Hark the trumpet sounds !
(*The exultant cry of the people is heard from outside*).
Now all is over, and the guilty man
Has paid his debt.

Enter ANOULA.

CHANDRA *makes a sign to PRITHA to withdraw.*

[*Exit PRITHA.*]

ANOULA. O Queen, make haste to come,
They march Virata to the Palace court ;
The guards forbade me access to the King,
I could not pass. Sweet Chandra, haste to come
Or it will be too late ; he must not die ;
Thou, at the last, canst surely win his pardon.
Thou answerest nothing. Speak !
(*Pause*).

It is too late ?

They've killed him ?

(*Pause*).

Answer, answer, speak to me.

CHANDRA. I heard the trumpet sound a second time.
(*Pause*).

ANOULA. Too late ! I pray you, Chandra, look at me ;
I am as calm as statues carved in stone.
It is all over. I will weep no tears,
Nor rend my hair and garments. It is well
For him, my love, my light, my joy, my life ;—
But for thy wretched husband and for thee
It is not well. Your grief is yet to come—

Your grief and my revenge. I curse you both.
Farewell and take my curse.

[*Exit* ANOULA.

Enter MAHASENA.

MAHASENA (*to* Chandra). The deed is done ;
I spoke no word ; thy wish has been fulfilled ;
I ask thee not for pardon or for pity,
Yet help me, Chandra, help me to endure,
Help me to live.

CHANDRA. You do beseech in vain.

MAHASENA. Rightly they named you daughter of the
moon.

Heartless and cold.

CHANDRA. If you had told me all
Before I wedded you, then, haply then,
I might have understood, I might have pitied ;
But with deceitful cunning you did trade
Upon my faith ! Oh ! there are deeds and things
Which freeze the heart and cannot be forgiven.
For you henceforth I am for ever dead,
As you are dead for me. I, whom you see,
Am but a painted mask, an unreal shadow,
A corpse, a ghost. I shall not come to life.

[*Exit* CHANDRA.

MAHASENA. Shall I crave pardon ? Shall I kneel and
weep ?

I will endure alone, nor seek to find
Pardon or pity.

Enter ANOULA.

ANOULA. Already I have sought you

In vain to-day ; but brief shall be my words.
I hoped unto the last, I could not think
That you could see the slaughter of Virata.
Now words are vain. I wait the festival ;
Upon the day you keep the sacred rite,
I to your loving people will speak clearly ;
And they—I know them ; when Virata died
They say a yell of triumph rent the sky—
They will make haste to tear you limb from limb.

MAHASENA. Do as you will.

[*Exit* ANOULA.]

Enter MAHINDA.

MAHASENA. I would that you could read
What in my heart is sealed.

MAHINDA. 'Tis read already.
I know the past, the cause of Moggoli's death,
And all thy piteous tale.

MAHASENA. Anoula swears
To tell that story on the day of feast ;
I shall be killed and win the endless peace.

MAHINDA. Why thinkest thou thy soul shall rise to
peace ?

MAHASENA. Because this life is but a lying film
Which floats upon the ocean of the void ;
Because my soul has paid the price of peace
And nothingness.

MAHINDA. Not thus the soul wins peace,
And nothingness is not. The soul must live,
Until made pure by suffering it flies back

Like a frail spark into the boundless fire,
Which is the mind of God, from whence it came.

MAHASENA. If thus the soul must climb through pain to
peace,

Why must it leave the great tranquillity ?
Why must it undergo the stain of sin
If sin by expiation must be cleansed ?
There is a sorer wound, a sting more sharp
Than that inflicted by remorse's fang :
It is the knowledge that these things must be ;
That there is no escape, that we are bound
And dragged by fate's unmastered chariot
Along foul paths to end in nothingness !
The unprofitable, fruitless cruelty,
The needlessness of this unending circle
Of sin and its inevitable fruit ;
That man should be constrained to pit himself
Against the Fates, a gamester forced to throw
The dice against his will ; and should he win,
The prize is vanity, and should he lose,
The penalty is shame. All this descends
Upon the soul and loads it with despair.

MAHINDA. Thou art a portion of the eternal law ;
It is in vain to murmur and rebel.

MAHASENA. Thou canst not solve the riddle : I believe
No longer in the glory of the dream,
And crave but for the end.

MAHINDA. O King, O child,
Thine eyes once gazed upon the stainless light ;

A gleam of the immense tranquillity
Shone once in thee ; thou canst not falter now.

MAHASENA. I would die now ; I crave oblivion.

I seek the vastness and the end.

MAHINDA. Not thus

Canst thou attain the vastness.

MAHASENA. Dost thou know

What lies beyond the cheating veil of life ?

Out of the dark we come, methinks we'll find

The night once more ; but be it as it may

I pray for death.

MAHINDA. My child, the stealthy mist

Is still around thy soul, but it will rise.

I cannot prove my words ; but while I lived

In lonely meditation, while the flesh

Still lived, my soul was mingled with the peace,

Absorbed in the eternal mind and will

By ecstasy.

MAHASENA. Such visions are for thee ;

But I am fashioned of a coarser substance.

I shall not steal untimely death ; I leave

My life to fate ; Anoula tells her tale,

The rest be chance.

MAHINDA. And doth Anoula know

That if she spoke the load would from thee fall ?

How death itself is welcome to thee ?

MAHASENA. No,

She shall not know ; she thinks by telling all

To stab me with the deadliest of wounds.

I shall not undeceive her ; and the rest

I leave to chance, which governeth the world.

MAHINDA. The night enfolds thee: but the dawn will
come.

SCENE II.

MAHASENA'S *Terrace as in Act I.*

CHANDRA. The full moon rises o'er the mountain tops.

PRITHA. The King makes ready for the sacred rite.

Enter MAHASENA.

CHANDRA. You will attend the rite ?

MAHASENA. And likewise you.

CHANDRA. I go not.

MAHASENA. You forget your royal task.

You must be present at the festival.

CHANDRA. Anoula came to me. She swears to keep
Her promise.

MAHASENA. Pity her, poor foolish child,
Whose hope is that by unmasking me to men,
And by my death to taste of sweet revenge.
She could not find a sweeter gift for me
Than bitter death.

CHANDRA. For this poor island's sake
Prevent the deed.

MAHASENA. Much, much you ask of me.
You have refused all pity and all aid.

You bade me drink the bitter wine ; but now
Have I not drunk it to the dregs ? Ah no !
A drop still lingers in the cup, and you
Now proffer it. Oh ! Chandra, heed me well :
If you had granted me one spark of pity,
Then gladly for your sake had I fulfilled
This last supremest sacrifice. But you,
Who took away all hope and power to live,
Wish now to rob me of my death. No, no.
I care not, I shall let Anoula speak.

CHANDRA. Remember there are others in the world
Who call for death and call in vain. Farewell.

[Exit CHANDRA.]

(Voices are heard singing).

Come, for the darkness has risen from earth,
And the moon has breathed o'er the sleeping sea.
We are weary of toil, we are sated with mirth,
We are fain to dream, and our dream is of thee.
The moon and the stars and the lotus flower
And lilies and dusk are of no avail ;
For thou art the dream of the twilight hour,
And lotus and lily, O fair ! O frail !

(CHANDRA walks across the stage with her Maidens).

MAHASENA. O vision, rising from the heart of night,
Has ever beauty been as this before ?
The moon is hid, but thou, her child, dost breathe
Diviner radiance. Do I live or dream ?
The far-off sea, the mountains and the trees

Are touched, and tremble with the silent spell.
The sky's vault like a molten sapphire glows,
And over the thick billows of the darkness
The stars float like a frail and glistening web.
But light and darkness, stillness and sweet sounds
All seem but as the sighing of a harp
That follows and enfolds a singing voice ;
And thou, O Chandra, art that voice divine—
The holy chime of midnight's harmony,
The blossom of the stillness, and the dream
Of slumbering earth ! The beauty of the world
Is now revealed in thee, O voiceless Song !
Soft star of dew ! Mysterious diadem
Of summer darkness ! Delicate skein of foam
Unfolded on the ocean of the night !
Softly a flood of glory from the moon
Steals o'er the earth ; the ugly shapes of day
Are hidden ; the tumult and the toil are done ;
Faint music only in the darkness sounds,
Breathing a hymn of beauty to thy name ;
And the great world repeats the rapturous praise.
The sky with all its myriad starry eyes,
The earth with fragrant breath and fleeting sounds,
The sea with its deep throbbing heart. The world
Attuned to harmony seems all divine.
And what am I to scan the drift and purpose
Of the vast whole ? Ah ! how can mortal minds
Read the dark riddle ? for the scheme of things
Is vast, and man an atom of the scheme ;

And mighty are the signs of the great plan :
The suns, the whirling stars, the shapes of life
Innumerable, the countless semblances,
The storm, the thunder and the rushing sea,
The hum of forests and the huge mute plain,
The silence of the unfooted fields of snow ;
Splendour and beauty, harmony and light
And love and joy, and grief and holy tears.
The goodness that, despite the blows of Fate,
Deserts not man ; and all things brave and fair.
These things are, too, the gifts of life, they shine
Alone by the close neighbourhood of evil.
And rightly does the soul fly down to earth
And writhe in shuddering flesh to know these things :
By these things to be proved ; if gold be proved not
We know not it is gold—so with the soul
Perchance ? No man will ever read life's riddle,
But they who cease to question and rebel
Against the universal law ; for these
The riddle will be solved ; perplexity
Will cease for them, as now, for me it ceases.
A song that has no music and no sound,
A light has filled my soul and built a bridge
Between infinity and my despair.

Enter ANOULA.

ANOULA. The hour is almost come.

MAHASENA.

The full moon shines

I will go celebrate the solemn rite.

ANOULA. And I come too.

MAHASENA. Yes, you shall come with me.

And if you will, Anoula, tell my tale ;

And if you speak, my sorrow like a cloud
Will rise from off my soul and melt in air.

Ay, if they kill me, death will fall on me
Like long-desired dew on thirsty trees.

And if you speak not, then must I fulfil
The harder task to live, a mask, a show,
And bear the scorn of her, whom once I loved
With the great love that dares the darkest crime.

Thus, solitary, must I live, Anoula.

Do as you will. I tell you the whole truth,
Lest you be cheated of your sweet revenge,
And think that death and public shame were bitter.

*Enter MAHINDA and Priests. Trumpets sound, the
Priests walk up to MAHASENA and clothe him
with a white robe and crown.*

PEOPLE shout. Long live the King ! Hail Mahasena, hail !

*MAHASENA walks towards CHANDRA and, looking at
her imploringly, he holds out his hand ; she
looks away from him and, scarcely touching the
tips of his fingers, lets him lead her up into
the temple.*

MAHINDA. Now is the moment to unfold thy tale.

ANOULA. I spoke with him, and he laid bare his soul.

If I keep silence he will suffer more
Than if I speak ; life is a bitterer thing

Than death to him, and public shame would lift
The burden from his heart. He craves to speak,
To tear away the mask and shew the truth.
And though I know that my revenge is greater
By this my deed, it is not from revenge
I hold my peace; I swear I pity him.
I cannot be the one to tear the mask
And strip his bleeding heart before the crowd.
Let fate and chance deal with him as they may,
I hold my peace now, and for evermore.
I go into the darkness. Fare thee well.

(She stabs herself).

MAHINDA. Anoula has left her sorrow and her care;
Her soul has sunk into the gentle night.
Peace! Bear her body gently to her home.

[Beckons to Attendants outside.]

(Enter Attendants, who bear away the body).

Enter MAHASENA and CHANDRA).

MAHASENA. Give me thy blessing, Father, as of old.
(He kneels).

MAHINDA. Now can I bless thee, for the hour is come.

MAHASENA. Thou spakest truth and through the mists
of pain,

Although they never rise nor melt away,

I through their veil have seen the face of peace.

(Rising, to CHANDRA). Sorrow will ever be, yet in my
soul

There shines a light no sorrow in the world,

Not shame, disaster, nor the wiles of men
Can quench or stifle ; and my mind has risen
Out of the sea of darkness and the pit ;
And it will ever soar through fields of space,
Until it reach the great tranquility,
And there dissolve in the unending flame.
The note which in my life will fade away,
The music whence it issued hath no end,
No death, no birth : but like an endless stream
For ever broadens to infinity,
And varies with unvariable law.
And only by submission to the law,
When the consenting soul in concord chimes
With the eternal purpose comes the Light,
The Light to man, and with the light is peace.

Enter Priests and the People.

MAHASENA *walks towards* CHANDRA *and leads her to the throne ; she gives him her hand as before with averted eyes, and they ascend the throne together.*

THE END.

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